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France: The Waning Presence of the Bureaucratic Elite

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A Research Paper

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
with assistance from [redacted] both of the
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of the Bureaucratic Elite**

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Overview

*Information available
as of 20 April 1985
was used in this report.*

The unique power of the French bureaucratic elite has long been a standard theme of academic and journalistic commentators. Controversy over the elite's role has never been livelier than in the past decade or so, when many Frenchmen began to speak of what they called "enarchy"—rule by graduates of the National School of Administration (ENA).

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Our review of the data, however, suggests that those who fear a self-perpetuating bureaucratic oligarchy are misreading the trends. To be sure, members of the bureaucratic elite have consistently had a significant presence in both the administrative and the political worlds. In politics, although they are a decided minority in numerical terms, they are heavily represented at the top of most parties and on the lists of political "comers." But even under President Giscard, when the "enarchy" controversy was at its height, governments were drawing a progressively smaller share of their ministers from groups at the top of the elite. This trend accelerated sharply when the left came to power in 1981.

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Within the bureaucracy, the so-called *grands corps*—the most prestigious groups in the civil service—dominated the top posts until the accession of the left, but their presence has diminished drastically in both absolute and relative terms since then.

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We expect these trends to persist as long as the left holds the presidency, and we think the key lesson—that it often makes sense for politicians to supersede bureaucrats in both ministerial posts and top administrative jobs—will appeal to other politicians besides those on the left. Thus, even if a conservative is elected president in 1988 (as now looks likely), we think it unlikely that the elite will regain its former role.

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Charting the impact of this change on French policy is difficult, since policies are more heavily affected by factors other than the institutional changes discussed here. At the most general level, however, we think that with the decline in the presence of the bureaucratic elite, the policymaking process may be less strongly affected by the inductive approach associated with "enarchs" like Giscard—who tended to make decisions on the basis of what "ought" to be French policy and sometimes ignored the prospects for success—and more by the sort of swings between ideology and pragmatism that have often characterized the Mitterrand regime.

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Somewhat more specific speculation is possible about the effect on the French political system:

- It seems almost certain that an influential minority of elected officials will continue to come from the elite. But we doubt that the number of successful politicians from this group will grow significantly; because the pool of potential leaders is growing and the elite's career channels are more open to challenge, we think a modest decline is likelier. We believe analysis of political succession in France will become even more difficult as a result.
- If the *grands corps* lose their dominance at the top of the administrative structure, the informal network that has been an important element in getting things done may suffer. The institution of the presidency, which is short on both bureaucratic structure and historical tradition, might be particularly vulnerable; we think the President will be more on his own in ensuring the smooth execution of his policies. Because foreign policy has traditionally been conducted from the presidency, the conduct of foreign affairs might also become less effective or consistent.

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France: The Waning Presence of the Bureaucratic Elite

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Introduction

The unique power of the bureaucratic elite in France has long been a standard theme of academic and journalistic commentators. This has never been more true than in the past decade or so, when French observers began to speak of "enarchy"—rule by graduates of the National School of Administration (ENA). During the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, it appeared to many that the best route to political power lay through bureaucratic staff positions that were all but monopolized by the elite. Jacques Chirac, then Giscard's chief rival on the center-right, was like Giscard an ENA graduate and a member of a bureaucratic *grand corps*, as were many top Socialist leaders. The Giscard regime has been superseded by a government of the left, but the notion that democracy is losing out to a self-perpetuating bureaucratic oligarchy has persisted.

In this paper, we attempt to determine whether the power of the bureaucratic elite has in fact been growing. To do so, we have examined changes in the makeup of governments and ministerial staffs, particularly in the last years of the Giscard era and since the accession of the left in 1981. The data indicate that the bureaucratic elite constitutes something of a privileged caste and that its members wield significant power. In addition, the data strongly suggest that important political figures will continue to emerge from its ranks. The examination also shows, however, that the elite's hold on influential positions has steadily weakened. Very slowly the French system appears to be opening up, and we doubt that the bureaucratic elite will regain its old status.¹

The Bureaucratic Elite: A Uniquely French Institution

The French bureaucratic elite is set apart by a unique course of training and an equally unique set of

The French Bureaucracy: A Continuing Source of Controversy

"Back in 1969, young French radicals had already denounced the takeover of political-economic power by the technostructure. Since then the epidemic has spread throughout French society. Severe even before 1981, it has gained ground with the accession of the Socialists into power, especially because of the nationalizations. Government, ministers' departmental staff, parliament, nationalized firms and even private corporations are progressively colonized by the higher civil servants."

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*A French Scholar, Writing in the Wall
Street Journal, March 1985*

institutions, some of them dating back to the old regime and even the Middle Ages. Those who make it into the bureaucratic *grands corps* gain prestige, power, job security, financial reward, and the chance of a further career outside the bureaucracy, either in public or private firms or in politics. Moreover, in most cases success comes when an individual still is relatively young. The sense of uniqueness often breeds arrogance—a trait noted even by the members of the *grands corps* themselves.

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Competitiveness

The competition for places has always been intense. The *grandes écoles* that train most members of the elite select their students in a rigorous examination, and fewer than 20 percent of their top graduates get offers from the *grands corps*. In interviews with academic researchers, the members of the elite show pride in having won out against the ablest of their contemporaries, as well as a conviction that to come out on top requires not just intelligence but ambition, dedication, and a certain amount of ruthlessness.

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The Bureaucratic Elite Structure in France

The bureaucratic corps is a uniquely French institution, although bodies such as the US State Department's Foreign Service or the Agriculture Department's Forest Service are somewhat analogous. A corps is a part of the government apparatus, but it has its own superstructure and enjoys considerable autonomy. It has a say in the assignments of its members, and it draws a degree of loyalty from them. The bulk of French civil servants are members of corps; there is a Posts and Telegraphs corps, a Customs corps, and so on. [redacted]

The so-called grands corps (the singular is grand corps) are the most prestigious of these bodies. Each grand corps originally had fairly narrow functions (functions that still are reflected in their names), but their members now are generalists who often take roles far removed from the original task. Scholars usually include five corps in this category: the Council of State, the General Inspectorate of Finances, the Court of Accounts, and two "engineering" corps—Bridges and Roads, and Mines. The diplomatic and prefectural corps sometimes are included with the other five, but their members generally do not receive the wide-ranging assignments that are the hallmark of a grand corps. [redacted]

Most members of a grand corps were chosen because they were the highest ranking graduates of special schools—the grandes ecoles, which take the place of university training for most of the individuals involved. Nearly all the members of the two engineering corps came from the Polytechnic School, which was established after the French Revolution to train military engineers; it still is nominally subordinate to the Ministry of Defense, and many of its graduates still take technical posts in the military. The other three grands corps take most of their members from the National School of Administration (ENA), which was established in 1945 and was modeled on the Polytechnic. [redacted]

The grands corps are small, made up in all perhaps of 1,500 individuals; and, because well over half the members are working within their corps at any one time, the number scattered through government and industry is even smaller. The grandes ecoles are commensurately small. During most of ENA's existence, each class included anywhere from a little over 50 to a little over 100 students; since 1974, the numbers have ranged from about 130 to about 160. [redacted]

Many members of a grand corps never leave it; these perform the duties historically assigned to a given corps.

A member of the Court of Accounts working within his corps, for example, would audit the books of a set of government entities, and a member of the Bridges and Roads corps probably would be involved in public works projects. An individual in these assignments often receives substantial fees. One scholar estimated that an Inspector of Finances in a rapidly growing region may get 50,000 francs a month (about \$5,000 at current prices) for signing loan applications, and that higher ranking members of the Bridges and Roads corps receive as much as 41 percent of their income from obligatory honorariums. [redacted]

Those so inclined may go on detached duty outside the corps after about four years. Many move to a ministry that is considered their corps' "turf": Council of State to Justice; Inspectors of Finances and Court of Accounts to Finance; Bridges and Roads to Urban Affairs and Housing; Mines to Industry and Research. The most ambitious try to move further, however. The most prized are spots on the staffs of the President or the Prime Minister, which some view as launching pads for political careers. In addition, a small but significant number go into politics. Finally, the Inspectorate of Finances and the Mines corps in particular have been vigorous colonizers of public and private corporations, the former in banking and the latter in industry. [redacted]

A member of a grand corps on detached duty retains his status in the corps and continues to receive a government salary as a result of his membership. In 1983, 70 out of 279 members of the Court of Accounts and 107 of 214 members of the Inspectorate of Finances were listed as being on detached duty. [redacted]

Some ENA graduates enter other corps, notably the foreign service and the prefectural corps. Most of those who do not enter a grand corps, however, are designated "civil administrators." According to the academic literature, ENA's founders envisaged that all the school's graduates would have this title and that civil administrators would undercut the grands corps by taking the same sort of wide-ranging assignments. It is typical of the grands corps' skill at institutional infighting that they captured the ENA educational process and turned it to their advantage. Civil administrators have higher standing than ordinary members of the bureaucracy, but neither their mobility nor their prestige matches that of the grands corps. [redacted]

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The competitive instinct persists after entry into the *grands corps*. Members work to attract the ablest graduates of a *grande école* and to promote the careers of their younger brethren—a process they regard as critical to the continued success of the *corps*. According to interview data, they bring this same competitiveness to their bureaucratic posts, and in daily give-and-take the needs of the ministry generally take precedence over solidarity with one's *corps*. At the same time, members of the elite do say they rely heavily on contacts with other *corps* members to build coalitions and align interests; even critics of the elite recognize the practical importance of the informal communication networks based on the *grands corps*. []

Scholars report that, because members of the bureaucratic elite view the world as highly competitive, they put a premium on anticipating problems and opportunities—an attitude that encourages greater creativity and more risk taking than might be expected from a stereotypical bureaucrat. All the five *grands corps*, but particularly Mines and the Inspectorate of Finances, try to stake claims in areas of dynamic government activity. The way Inspectors of Finances gained top administrative posts during the Giscard era is one example; the role of the Mines *corps* in the French nuclear energy program is another case that in some ways is more revealing (see the appendix). []

The Selectivity Issue

Numerous academic studies indicate that disproportionate numbers of the *grands corps* come from privileged backgrounds; in a high share of cases the fathers were also high-ranking bureaucrats. Notwithstanding the ostensibly objective nature of the selection process, those brought up within the elite consistently do better than outsiders.² []

These recruitment patterns have little correlation with the political biases of any French regime, in our view. Specialists in elite studies have consistently found little or no relationship between social background and policy preference, and in France as in most Western societies a high proportion of the bureaucratic elite pride themselves on being divorced from

² In 1982, the government established a new procedure by which individuals with long careers as elected officials in local governments, unions, and the like could enter ENA. Relatively few people have used the procedure so far, and the school's top-ranking graduates still tend to come from elite families. []

The Grands Corps Look Out for Their Own

Each corps wants someone in a ministerial cabinet so that it can have a "lobby." . . . The Mines corps, the Bridges corps have ways of soliciting places that are discreet but remarkably effective. You're assailed with very pointed phone calls to find a place for someone . . . The Inspectorate of Finances has a supreme skill: to intervene without anyone noticing. [] 25X1

A Director of Cabinet to a French Academic Interviewer

partisan politics. Those who have strong political preferences are to be found across the spectrum, although most scholars believe the *grands corps* contain more rightists than leftists; there are very few members of the Communist Party. In the Socialist Party, Prime Minister Fabius is a member of a *grand corps*, as are Michel Rocard, the leader of the party's most conservative faction, and Jean-Pierre Chevènement, founder and head of the leftwing CERES group. President Mitterrand was trained as a lawyer and is not a member of a *grand corps*. [] 25X1

Thus, when the Socialists came to power, they could recruit both from those of the elite who shared their outlook, and from those who considered service to the state (and their own careers) more important than the ideological orientation of the new government. [] 25X1

Another charge sometimes leveled against the elite is that it forms an oligarchy of technocrats. In fact, most members of the elite—and ENA graduates in particular—make it clear that they think of themselves as generalists. Over half the two-year ENA course consists of practical, on-the-job experience, and in the formal part of the curriculum, case studies occupy as much time as academic work.³ ENA students and graduates consistently say that the ability to work effectively in a variety of fields is more important

³ According to one scholar, the Polytechnic and the two schools run by the engineering *grands corps* give more emphasis to traditional academic disciplines, particularly economics. [] 25X1

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The Virtues of Ignorance

My great advantage as head of this bank is that I never had a modest job in a bank, so I knew nothing about banking before coming to this post.

A member of the elite to a US academic interviewer

than narrow expertise, and graduates of the *grandes ecoles* often say the contacts they make at the schools are more important than the courses they take. Members of the elite even tout their lack of expertise as a virtue.

How Does the Elite Operate?

According to academic observers, the elite concentrates most of its activity on maneuvering within the administrative structure. Interviews and the comments of scholars make it clear that members of the *grands corps* bring formidable strengths to bear:

- Intelligence, maneuvering skill, and a sense of the possible, all of them honed by training and experience.
- A network of contacts with other members of the elite inside and outside a given *corps*—a network extending beyond government to public and private institutions.
- Nearly absolute job security, combined with the continuity that grows out of bureaucratic traditions and is reinforced by the traditions of the *grands corps*.
- Not least, a sense of confidence that flows from the sort of early and repeated success enjoyed by most of those involved.

These strengths help explain why the bureaucratic elite is perceived to have greater power in France than in other countries. But we think it is equally clear that there are definite limits to the elite's capabilities:

- The *grands corps* may be more open to risk taking and perhaps even more aggressive than the stereotypical bureaucrat, but researchers report that the risks tend to be taken within a fairly narrow range.

According to observers inside and outside of the academic world, the training program's emphasis on case studies encourages students to think in terms of the "school solution"—the way the *grands corps* have always solved a given type of problem. At times, according to interview data, members of the elite also value inductive reasoning more highly than investigation of the facts. The intellectual blinders worn by many members of the elite help explain one scholar's corrosive appraisal of Giscard, the quintessential Inspector of Finances: "a quick and organized intelligence which was more concrete than speculative, more precise than interesting, and often more clear than truly illuminating."

- Although members of the bureaucratic elite tend to have a common outlook and work together when the *corps* are under attack, scholars have noted many situations where their attitudes diverged as they worked for their own interests—the interests of pressure groups, of ministry, of *corps*, of government, not to mention their own career goals. In the aggregate the elite may have considerable power, but in our view its members often use their power against each other.

A more fundamental source of potential weakness is that in the end the bureaucratic elite's authority is derivative. In France as in other democratic societies, power rests ultimately with elected officials. Bureaucrats have only such power as politicians delegate to them, either explicitly or by default or tradition; and what the politicians have given, they can take away. This fact takes on greater importance because French politicians and bureaucrats have less in common than those in many other countries. As a US scholar has observed, "There probably are few democratic societies where legislators are held in as much contempt by bureaucrats as they are in France."

Before and After the Accession of the Left: A Balance Sheet

The validity of the "enarchy" concept hinges, we believe, on the degree to which the strength of the bureaucratic elite is growing vis-a-vis the political

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world. We see two ways such an encroachment might occur: members of the *grands corps* might become increasingly influential in electoral politics, or they might build on their position in the administrative apparatus. One way of assessing the reach of the elite in these two senses is to examine its political and government role over the 27 years of the Fifth Republic, and especially since the left replaced the center-right in 1981. []

The Elite as Politicians: A Continuing Presence

Members of the *grands corps* have constituted a significant minority in the legislature throughout the Fifth Republic; their presence increased slightly when the left took control in 1981. The following tabulation shows the number of *grands corps* members who were elected to the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in 1968, 1978, and 1983 (the numbers include those who resigned after election to take ministerial posts):

1968	21
1978	24
1983	26

Old warhorses like former Prime Minister Debre are included in these totals, but the lists also include Fabius, Giscard, Gaullist leader Chirac, and a fair proportion of other present and potential leaders. As in other fields, those from the *grands corps* who get over the preliminary hurdles in politics have tended to do well, with the result that, even though their presence in the political world is minimal in purely quantitative terms, they are prominent in the upper reaches of most parties and in the lists of political "comers." []

The findings of one French researcher, however, suggest that their political prospects have not improved over the years. He reports that the proportion of ministers from the three "ENA" *grands corps* was actually declining even under Giscard, when the cries of "enarchy" were reaching their peak (see the graphic; we have added data for the Mauroy government in early 1983). Thus, one part of the conventional wisdom—that membership in a *grand corps* gives special entree to a ministerial post—was open to question even before the left came to power; it certainly has not been true since then. []

Moreover, an examination of the career patterns of deputies and senators in 1983 calls into question another part of the conventional wisdom—that the route to power lies through increasingly responsible bureaucratic posts. The notion holds for some legislators from the de Gaulle and Pompidou eras, who entered the legislature only after they became ministers,⁴ and for individuals like Chirac, who rose rapidly to a post on Pompidou's staff. More typically, however, members of the group spent only about five years in bureaucratic jobs, and few achieved particularly high-ranking positions before they switched to politics. We conclude that it would be a mistake to concentrate on directors of cabinet and the like when searching for the next generation of political leaders; if political leaders are to come from the *grands corps*, they are likelier to come from among those who have put such jobs behind them in favor of activity in the traditional political arena. []

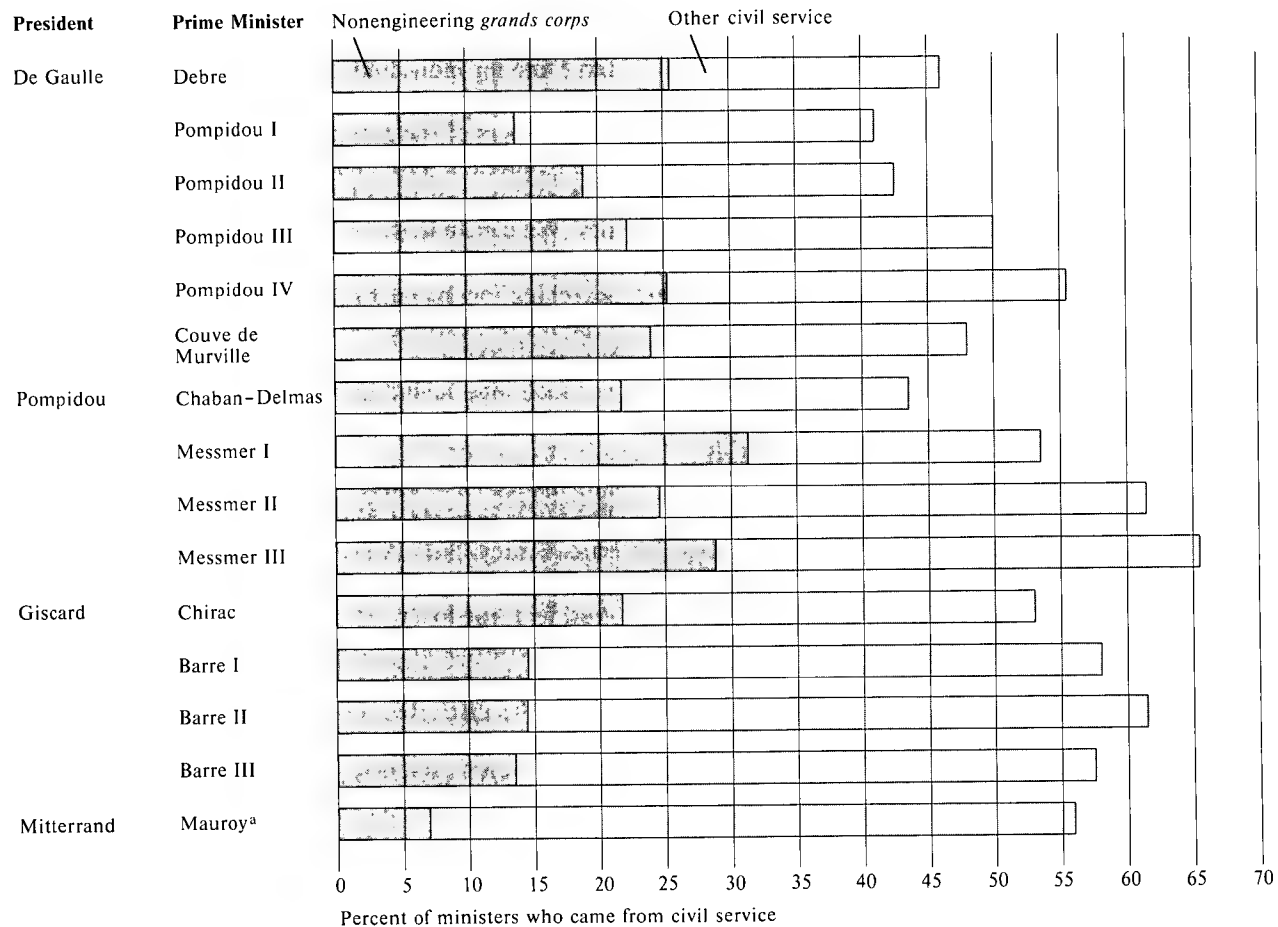
The Institutional Aspect: Ministerial Staffs

The other possible vehicle for the *grands corps* is the bureaucracy itself. A useful indicator of their strength on this score is their presence on the staffs of the President, the Prime Minister, and the other members of the government. Notwithstanding the popular perception, this presence grew very little from the formation of the Fifth Republic through the Giscard era.⁵ According to one French scholar, members of the three "ENA" *grands corps* accounted for 13 percent of the personnel of presidential and ministerial staffs in 1958 and for 19 percent in 1968, near the end of de Gaulle's term. Our analysis indicates that these three *corps* made up about 19 percent of the staffs in 1980, during Giscard's presidency. At the same time, the five *grands corps*, together with the diplomatic and prefectural *corps*, had a virtual monopoly of the top posts in 1980. And we think this latter fact goes far to explain the resonance of the "enarchy" issue in the Giscard era. []

⁴ Pompidou insisted that his ministers from the bureaucracy run for legislative office. []

⁵ This analysis is hampered by comparability problems: data have been assembled at different times by different researchers using a variety of criteria. The available statistics display obvious discontinuities, but we believe broad trends can be discerned with reasonable accuracy. []

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Confidential**Civil Service Ministers in Fifth Republic Governments, 1958-83**

^a Of the 24 civil service ministers in the Mauroy government, 18 came from the teaching profession—a group that had not figured significantly in earlier governments.

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Detailed analysis discloses the following trends since the left came to power (see tables 1 and 2):

- The relative strength of the *grands corps* in ministerial cabinets declined sharply in 1981, but the drop was due almost entirely to an enormous increase in the size of the staffs; in absolute terms their totals held up quite well at first. Their presence diminished in both absolute and relative terms over the succeeding three years; although the *grands corps*

recovered slightly when the Fabius government was established in 1984 their numbers were about three-fifths of what they had been in 1980.⁶

⁶ Even more striking was the virtual disappearance of the prefectoral *corps* from these staffs. Giscard had used the prefects for political purposes, according to many French observers. The diplomatic *corps* has maintained its strength; indeed in both 1983 and 1984 its members were more numerous than those of any one *grand corps*. They were heavily concentrated in the Foreign Ministry, however, rather than being distributed among several staffs as was the case for the *grands corps*.

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Table 1
The Elite in Ministerial Cabinets, 1980-84

	Total in Cabinets	Five <i>Grands Corps</i>		Nonengineering <i>Grands Corps</i>		Engineering <i>Grands Corps</i>		Civil Administrators	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1980	220	62	28.2	41	18.6	21	9.5	38	17.3
1981	511	58	11.4	40	7.8	18	3.5	79	15.5
1983 ^a	520	46	8.8	28	5.4	18	3.5	48	9.2
1984 ^a	360	36	10.0	23	6.4	13	3.6	43	11.9

^a The totals for 1983 and 1984 include one individual—Jean-Louis Bianco, the Secretary-General of the Presidency—who is counted as both a Mines engineer and a member of the Council of State.

- Among the major gainers when the left took over were the civil administrators—ENA graduates who had not been taken into a *grand corps*. Their gains were even more impressive in qualitative terms. In 1980, near the end of Giscard's term, there were only two civil administrators who were directors or deputy directors of cabinet; there were 16 in 1983 and 19 in 1984.
- Moreover, for the first time many directors and deputy directors of cabinet—30 out of 69 in 1981, 20 out of 63 in 1983, and perhaps as many as 20 out of 60 after Fabius took over the prime-ministership—had not graduated from either ENA or the Polytechnic.

Thus, under Mitterrand the top of the bureaucratic pyramid is no longer the preserve of the *grands corps*, or even of those who have graduated from the *grandes ecoles*. Moreover, the top of the pyramid is bigger than it was under Giscard, and all the increase has come from outside the traditional bureaucratic elite.

The reasons for these changes are numerous:

- One reason for the initial growth in the size of the staffs, in our view, was a desire to bring in advisers

who were a known quantity politically and to satisfy obligations to party militants. Another may have been to balance the still-numerous bureaucratic elite.

- Political involvement probably was one reason for the appointment of many civil administrators. A study of presidential and ministerial staffs in 1981 made it clear that civil administrators were far likelier than members of the *grands corps* to have participated in Socialist Party activity.
- But at the same time civil administrators are less likely than members of the *grands corps* to have political ambitions of their own. Only nine members of the current National Assembly are civil administrators, whereas there are 23 legislators from the *grands corps* and three others who gave up their Assembly seats when they became ministers. We think this combination of high political involvement and low political ambition among civil administrators held a powerful appeal for the incoming administration.

- The persistent decline of the “ENA” *grands corps* probably is due partly to cultural differences between the bureaucratic elite and the “outsiders”

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Table 2 *Number of Persons*
The Nonengineering *Grands Corps*
in Ministerial Cabinets

	Council of State	Court of Accounts	Inspectorate of Finances
1980	12	14	15
1981	17	12	11
1983	14	9	5
1984	11	5	7

who came into government with the triumph of the left. In addition, however, we suspect the incoming government decided it could go elsewhere for the sort of skills offered by the *grands corps*. As we have noted, ENA's special cachet is built on its graduates' ability as generalists, and we think the new government found similar abilities, together with greater political compatibility, less arrogance, and greater malleability, among the civil administrators. This is a conclusion that politicians besides those on the left might draw. If so, generalists in the *grands corps* may continue to have trouble gaining influential places.

- If a generalist background has in fact become less desirable, the ratio between ENA and Polytechnic graduates may shift toward the Polytechnic, which gives its students a somewhat more thorough academic grounding.⁷

According to press reports, there is at least some feeling among knowledgeable Frenchmen that prospects are better for those in the engineering than in the nonengineering *grands corps*. It may be a harbinger of things to come that Jean-Louis Bianco, the Secretary-General of the Presidency, is both a Mines engineer and a member of the Council of State, and that Jacques Attali, apparently Mitterrand's closest adviser from the ranks of the traditional elite, is a graduate of both ENA and the Polytechnic.

⁷ The ratio of "polytechnicians" to "enarchs" on the staffs increased until 1972, according to one French study. We have no data for succeeding years, although we would assume that the trend was reversed under Giscard.

An Engineering or a Nonengineering Grand Corps?

If one of these Polytechnic graduates now studying at ENA could join the Bridges corps rather than an "ENA" grand corps, I would counsel him to make the right choice: Bridges.

An instructor at ENA

The Elite's Prospects

As long as the left holds the presidency, we would expect the patterns of the last four years to continue, with the traditional elite less well represented in ministerial posts and sharing the top staff positions with civil administrators and individuals from outside the elite structure. We also think these basic patterns will persist if (as now looks likely) the left loses the presidential elections in 1988. In our view, the *grands corps* would fare somewhat better under any of the three main conservative candidates (Barre, Chirac, or Giscard) than under the left, but we doubt that they would do as well as in earlier days.

One important factor, we believe, will be whether the winner relies heavily on an organized party. If he does, he will have the same sort of ties and obligations that helped bring large numbers of Socialist loyalists into both the government and the ministerial staffs in 1981. In our view, there would be more jobs to fill than there are members of the elite in party organizations; thus, many appointees—including appointees at the top—are likely to come from outside the elite.

We believe this factor would weigh heavily with Chirac, who has turned the old Gaullist party into his personal machine and whose victory almost certainly would be the result of its efforts. Thus, even though Chirac is a member of the Court of Accounts, we would not expect him to favor the *grands corps* as Giscard did. We think the same constraints would affect Giscard himself to some degree. Giscard made it clear during his time in office that he saw an

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organized party as one key to political success, and he spent his presidency trying to build one. He is continuing these efforts, and, to the extent he succeeds, he too will have obligations that often cannot be satisfied by appointing members of the *grands corps*.

By contrast, the French press indicates that Barre intends to campaign without a formal party organization; his ability to keep up with the other two candidates in the polls is an index of the uncertain relationship between parties and presidential politics. Although he might come to the presidency with few debts to a political party, of the three he has the weakest ties to the bureaucratic elite. He came out of a university rather than a *grande ecole*,⁸ and it was during his tenure as Prime Minister that the decline in the *grands corps*' share of ministries became marked. We would expect him to draw on a number of sources for his appointments—and perhaps, given his training as an economist, to favor Polytechnic graduates over “enarchs.”

In the background for all three candidates, moreover, would be the lesson of the Mitterrand era: that the *grands corps* need not monopolize the top jobs and there may be political advantages in appointing others. We are not predicting that the elite will ever be shut out; its role is too well established, and we believe both the media and the public would look critically at an administration that had no members of the *grands corps* in prominent roles. We do think it unlikely, however, that the bureaucratic elite will regain the proportion of ministerial posts, or the near monopoly of leading staff positions, that it has had in the past. We believe the recent appointment of a civil administrator as head of the Bank of France illustrates this point.

What Does It Mean?

In our view, the declining presence of the *grands corps* is part of a slow process of institutional and social change that has gone on through the 27-year history

⁸ Barre is practically unique among French political figures in coming neither from the bureaucratic elite nor from the constituency-based world of traditional politicians.

of the Fifth Republic—a process that adversely affects the bureaucratic elite in several ways:

- An opening up of the political world: very gradually, recruitment to influential posts appears to be drawing on a progressively larger and more diverse group.
- Institutional changes, many of them focusing on the role of the presidency. The creation of a strong, popularly elected executive in the Fifth Republic transferred power from the legislature, the traditional stronghold of French politicians. At the outset of this process, in our view, it appeared that the bureaucracy would be the chief beneficiary; hence, the cries of “enarchy.” The elite’s declining presence, however, suggests that the politicians not only still can supersede the bureaucrats but quite frequently will do so. Only those few members of the elite who have made the transition to the political world seem able to buck the trend.

Moreover, reporting from press and academic sources suggests that Frenchmen are asking more questions about the proper role of the state—a major change, given the preponderant role played by the state through modern French history. The resurgence of conservative thought and the vogue of “Reaganomics” and “Thatcherism” are one sign of this tendency; the government’s own program of administrative decentralization is another; the shift to proportional representation—which undermines an elected representative’s hallowed ties with his constituency—is a third. We suspect there is somewhat less than meets the eye in all this talk,⁹ but any tendency to question the state’s role is bound to reduce the standing of the bureaucratic elite, in our view.

Implications for French Policy

Because many other factors—ideological and electoral considerations, personalities, political horse-trading, and the sheer flow of events—affect a country’s policies, it is always hard to chart the policy

⁹ An analysis of institutional change in France is in progress.

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impact of a slow trend like the decline of the elite. At the most general level, however, we think the policy-making process may be less strongly affected by the inductive approach associated with "enarchs" like Giscard. In the Giscard era, policymaking sometimes seemed to take a vaguely Cartesian form: it was decided what principles ought to be followed, and the government stuck to them no matter what the prospects for success. Ideology, in our view, was less important than the perception of what a French government "ought" to do. This approach led, for example, to an ineffective attack on the French tax structure early in Giscard's term and to more than one stillborn proposal on the Middle East. In our view, it contributed to Giscard's persistence in trying to maintain a privileged relationship with the Soviet Union; it also helps explain the government's dogged pursuit of its austerity program at great political cost under Prime Minister Barre. []

By contrast, although Mitterrand and his associates took office with a more heavily ideological set to their policies, they have tended to pay more attention to what is possible and to where France's basic interests lie. The best example of this tendency is the scrapping of their expansionary economic policy in 1982; others are the adoption of a lower profile on Central America when it became clear that French militancy was affecting relations with the United States, and Mitterrand's retreat on the issue of state control of private schools last summer. []

We would expect this sort of approach to be closer than Giscard's to the norm from now on; we think Mitterrand's successor also will be less concerned with what France "ought" to do. Mitterrand's continued support for the current austerity program makes it clear that sometimes neither ideology nor short-term political considerations will govern, but we think these factors will play an important role more often than not. One reason they will do so, in our view, is that there are fewer supporters of the inductive approach from the bureaucratic elite in high administrative offices. []

Implications for the Political Structure

Somewhat more specific speculation is possible about the impact on the political system. []

What Are the Politicians' Prospects? It seems almost certain that an influential minority of elected officials will continue to come from the elite and that many from this group will appear on political "comers" lists. Thus, the *grands corps* will remain an element in any analysis of political succession. But, because the elite's career channels now are more open to challenge, we think the *grands corps* make up a smaller proportion of most succession lists and the elite's prospects of reaching top political jobs—ministries, the prime-ministry, the presidency—have diminished. Analysis of political succession in France will become even more difficult as a result. []

What Are the Implications for Administrative Efficiency? The opening up of the system could make it more responsive and in that sense more effective. But it also could lead to reduced efficiency, especially at the top. For better or worse, the presidency is lacking in both the organizational structure and the depth of tradition that an American might expect; indeed, the extent of the president's constitutional authority still is not entirely clear. The executive, according to academic accounts, has depended heavily on informal relationships to implement its policies; and members of the *grands corps*, with their prestige, their contacts, and their ability to move things through the bureaucratic maze, have played a key role. If there are fewer members of the *grands corps* at this level, the chances of foulup—for example, a communications lapse, a failure to bring in an important constituency or interest group, or the breakdown of an interministerial understanding—may increase. []

Civil administrators doubtless will pick up a good deal of the slack, but researchers suggest that they may not have such extensive informal networks and may not be so assertive. Moreover, appointees from outside the bureaucratic structure will also play a role, and academic research indicates that outsiders often have trouble gaining control over a bureaucratic system. The combination of fewer insiders and more outsiders in key bureaucratic positions could make the administration more prone to error or simply less efficient on important issues. []

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At the least, we believe, the president will be more on his own in assuring the smooth execution of his policies. And, because the making of foreign policy has traditionally been the particular prerogative of the president, its conduct might also become less efficient or less consistent. If the president's conduct of foreign policy becomes more open to criticism, international issues—traditionally insulated from domestic politics in France—might also become more of a domestic political football.

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Appendix

A Grand Corps Success Story: The French Nuclear Program

Both the independent French nuclear deterrent and the French nuclear power program were to a significant degree the work of Mines engineers, according to academic studies. Members of the *corps* made skillful and flexible use of bureaucratic institutions, and they buttressed their efforts with the support of political leaders. They also enjoyed a good deal of luck—which may be running out.

The focus of their effort was the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA). At its establishment in 1945 the CEA was accountable only to the Prime Minister, and by the early 1950s it was dominated by Mines engineers. Its head during this period, believing that the French military was too closely wedded to the US deterrent, mounted an independent effort to give France its own nuclear capability. The CEA used members of the Mines *corps* in the military to further its goals; at critical moments it got the support of Prime Ministers Bourges-Maunoury and Gaillard, who were both graduates of the Polytechnic. As a result, development of the deterrent was well along when de Gaulle came to power in 1958.

De Gaulle's resignation in 1969 permitted a basic reorientation of the CEA. With President Pompidou's support, it worked from then on with the French electric utility (a government-owned corporation, which also had a large complement of Mines engineers) to develop a nuclear power program—a program that began to bear fruit shortly after the onset of the oil crises of the 1970s. The CEA showed considerable flexibility: to succeed, it had to reverse one of de Gaulle's key tenets and make use of US technology.

Some indexes of the CEA's success:

- Its head during the 1950s went on to become Armed Forces Minister.
- Its head in the late 1960s and early 1970s went on to become Energy Minister.
- A poll taken in 1980 indicated that 93 percent of the French populace approved of the work of the electric utility.

There was little reason to expect any change in nuclear policy when the left came to power in 1981. Even before the Socialist Party's accession, a majority of its energy committee came from the CEA or the electric utility. But the nuclear power program now is under severe financial pressure as a result of the oil glut—pressure arising in part from the very ambitiousness of the CEA's efforts—and the flexibility of the Mines *corps* will be tested in new ways as its members in the CEA and the electric utility deal with this challenge.



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